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Water Music: Metaphor and Marriage in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*

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In George Eliot's novel, *Middlemarch: A Study of Provincial Life*, she examines the foibles and follies, the trials and tribulations of a rural community facing the uncertainties of a rapidly industrializing Britain. Provincial, however, is hardly the word that one should use to describe the romantic relationships that Eliot creates in her novel. Even less dull and dreary are the metaphoric images that Eliot's narrator uses to describe, expand, and judge the connections between the two main couples in *Middlemarch*: William Ladislaw and Dorothea Brooke as well as Tertius Lydgate and Rosamond Vincy. When we explore the metaphors of *Middlemarch*, we can see the narrator's deft grasp of entwining the abstract and the real. This paper examines how *Middlemarch*'s narrator uses similar images and metaphors of water and music to describe the development and depth of *Middlemarch*'s dissimilar romantic relationships. The metaphors in *Middlemarch* work on two levels: upon the characters and upon the reader. A discussion of the critical theory of metaphor, informed by Paul Ricoeur, explains how characters and readers use imagination to unite disparate objects in order to create truth. The perception of the individual warps this imaginative function, causing a disconnection between the truth of the object and its metaphoric representation. In *Middlemarch*, these flawed perceptions are the basis of the narrator's criticism of the characters and their romantic relationships in the novel. However, the same criticism of perception can also be placed upon the reader. The reader's task, I argue, is to interpret how *Middlemarch*'s narrator is using similar metaphors to portray two very dissimilar relationships. It is only after we recognize and consciously address the problems of our own perception as readers that we can grasp *Middlemarch*'s vision of a true egalitarian marriage.

Information about the Author:

Hannah Scupham is a senior English and German major as well as a member of Christ College. She wrote this paper her freshman year and it has spurred her interest in Victorian literature ever since. She will be presenting this paper at the National Conference of Undergraduate Research this spring. She is currently planning on pursuing her love of literature in graduate school.

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